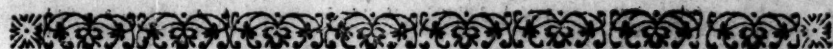


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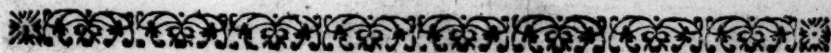
*P H L E G O N*'s  
**TESTIMONY**

Shewn to Relate to the

**D A R K N E S S**

Which happened at our

**S A V I O U R ' S P A S S I O N .**



THE BRITISH MUSEUM

R. H. L. E. G. O. W. S.

TESTIMONY

Shown to relate to the

(D.C.)

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Which happened at our

SAVIOUR'S PASSION.

THE BRITISH MUSEUM



**P H L E G O N's**  
**TESTIMONY**

Shewn to Relate to the

**D A R K N E S S**

Which happened at our

**S A V I O U R ' S P A S S I O N ,**

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In a **LETTER** to Dr. **SYKES.** (a.a.)

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**L O N D O N :**

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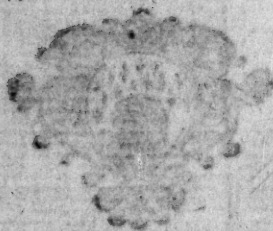
TESTIMONY

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What is the record of the

SAVIOUR'S PASSION.



L O M D O M

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# LETTER

TO the REVEREND

*Dr.* ASHLEY SYKES.

S I R,



THE *Eclipse* mentioned by *Phlegon*, in the thirteenth book of his *Olympiads*, and applied by all the most learned defenders of Christianity to the Darkness which happen'd at the Passion of our Saviour, having always appeared to me to be one of the most unexceptionable external proofs that we have handed down to us for any of the facts recorded by the *Evangelists*, and not meeting with any reasons in your Dissertation, and the Defence of it on this subject, to alter my

B

opinion,



opinion; I think proper to offer you some remarks upon your performances, with such freedom, as cannot but be agreeable to one, who, out of an entire love to truth, rises in opposition to one of the received testimonies of that religion which he believes to be true.

AND to convince you that I have no other intention in this undertaking, than with the utmost impartiality to consider what has been wrote on this occasion, I shall at once state the precise point in question, without meddling with your *rights* and *reasons* for entering into this controversy; or any of those accidental *differences* betwixt you and Mr. *Wh — n*, which might afford some entertainment to common readers, but are entirely foreign to the matter in debate.

THE true *state* of the question, as it appears to me, is, Whether the Eclipse mentioned by *Pblegon* has, or has not, any immediate connexion with the *Darkness* which happened at the *Passion*; and whether it is proper to be offered as a proof of that *Darkness*; or if, on the contrary, the accounts we have of his words are so various and undetermined,

determined, that they cannot with any certainty be applied to that remarkable event, but, circumstances being duly considered, must be supposed to relate to a natural *Eclipse* of the Sun that happened the 24th day of *November*, in the first year of the 202<sup>d</sup> olympiad, three years at least before the *Passion*.

MR. *Wh—n* therefore you justly complain of, for encreasing the bulk and number of his authorities, by bringing predictions from the *Prophets* foretelling, and passages from the *Fathers* referring to, this surprizing Darkness at the *Passion* ; since none of these passages make the least mention of *Phlegon*, or of the account given by him of the *Eclipse*. They might, indeed, were they free from other objections, be made use of to prove that there was a very astonishing *Darkness* at that point of time, against any one who rejects the concurrent testimonies of the *Evangelists*. But you have frequently declared in this controversy, that you fully believe there was such a *Darkness* as they describe : Those arguments then are improperly made use of against you, and most certainly do not affect the *point* that you maintain, which may be true, without impeaching the truth



of the *Scripture History* ; but if the contrary is so, a very strong additional light shines in upon the sacred testimony, and a plausible objection is wrested out of the hands of infidels, who in all ages, from the days of *Celsus*, down to the present times, have made use of it.

As I blame Mr. *Wh—n* for introducing arguments that are foreign to the point in debate, and mustering up some authorities which no man of learning can pay any regard to ; so I cannot help commending your conduct and diligence in fixing and establishing such material points, as can with certainty be discovered, without regarding how or in what manner they affect the argument. By this method, I must own, you have given more light to the question than ever it had before ; and had you every where in your reasoning preserved the same regard for certainties, and laid as little stress upon mere conjectures and possibilities, the conclusion, I imagine, would have been different, and I should have had no occasion to trouble you with these remarks.

You



YOU deserve the thanks of the learned world, in the first place, for fixing, by the assistance of your mathematical friends, the *time*, the *duration*, and the *central line* of the great *Eclipse*, taken so much notice of by *Kepler*. It is now established by their accurate calculations, that this *Eclipse* happened on the 24th of *November*, the first year of the 202<sup>d</sup> olympiad, about noon, that it was total about *Grand Cairo* and *Jerusalem*, and that the central line of it passed thro' or near these places.

AND you have a title to my thanks, in the next place, for establishing another very certain proposition, that for many years before and after this, there was not any other *Eclipse* of the Sun that was total in the latitudes of *Judæa* and *Bithynia* <sup>a</sup>.

THESE propositions are extremely important, in my judgment as well as in yours, towards the decision of the question in issue; and if we follow truth as carefully in applying, as we have in discovering them, we cannot possibly differ.

<sup>a</sup> Def. p. 67.

You,

You, Sir, and Mr. *Wh—n*, *Origen*, and *Celsus*, and all the world, whether christian or infidel, are agreed that there was a total *Eclipse* or *Darkness*, call it which you will, in the reign of *Tiberius*, of which *Phlegon* of *Tralles*, in his *Olympiads*, writes : and his authority being altogether unsuspected, the question is what he has asserted in regard to this matter, and not at all if what he has asserted is true. If therefore he has said, that this *Eclipse* happened in the first year of the 202<sup>d</sup> olympiad, it evidently follows, that his words do not relate to the *Darkness* that attended our Saviour's Passion, because we know that he did not suffer before the fourth of that olympiad ; and the *Eclipse* he speaks of may (but for some circumstances hereafter to be taken notice of) be that mentioned by *Kepler*, which you more accurately describe : But then it follows with equal certainty and clearness, that if *Phlegon* has not said his *Eclipse* happened in the first, but on the contrary assigns it to the fourth of that olympiad, his *Eclipse* and *Kepler's* are not the same ; nay more, *Phlegon's Eclipse* must be a preternatural one, if it is not *Kepler's*, because you have proved there was  
 no

no natural *Eclipse*, to which *Phlegon's* can be referred.

By this observation, the product of your labour, the question is very much shortned, and great light, which the antients were not masters of, is thrown in upon it. However celebrated some of the *Eastern* nations may have been for their discoveries and improvements in Astronomy, yet from many circumstances we may collect that this science was but little cultivated in the first ages of Christianity; and tho' it was as easy to calculate *Eclipses* backwards as forwards, yet it does not appear to us that any use was made of them by the most learned of the Christian *Fathers*, to determine the period of past events.

ALL they knew from *Phlegon*, was, that in such a year such a *Darkness* happened; when we who are better skilled in astronomy are acquainted with that circumstance only, we can say with certainty, if such a *Darkness* happened; For example, in the fourth year of the 202<sup>d</sup> olympiad, it was not by an *Eclipse* of the *Sun*, there was none in that year, and therefore the *Darkness* was preternatural :



natural : But the same text to them could not produce the same reflexion, and therefore they had recourse to arguments drawn from the circumstances of the fact mentioned by *Phlegon*, such as the *Time, Greatness* of the *Darkness*, and the *Earthquake* which accompanied it, to prove to themselves that this *Eclipse* was the same with that which happened at the *Passion* : And from this comparison, being themselves fully convinced of this, those of them, who, against their heathen adversaries, made use of *Phlegon's* authority, without quoting his words, blended these circumstances together, and by this means added some *particulars* which are not to be found in his account. Hence *Africanus*, as quoted by *Syncellus*, finding the *Darkness* at the *Passion* to have happened at *Full Moon*, and being thoroughly persuaded that *Phlegon's Eclipse* was the same the *Evangelists* describe, supposes that *Phlegon* said the *Eclipse* happened at *Full Moon*, and lasted from the sixth to the ninth hour : And he was a stranger to the irrefragable argument produced by you, which proves an Eclipse of the Sun in the fourth year of the 202<sup>d</sup> olympiad to be as miraculous an event, as if it had happened at Full Moon.

HAD

HAD *Phlegon* truly said, that the *Eclipse* he mentions happened at *Full Moon*, in the reign of *Tiberius*, *Celsus* and all the world must have agreed that it had fully answered the whole scope of the Christian Argument, tho' it had no nearer relation to the date of the *Passion*, than that it fell within the reign of *Tiberius* : because a Phœnomenon so thoroughly unaccountable from any known cause, would readily be deemed the same with that of the like nature which fell within the same reign, tho' the precise year of either were not known. *Phlegon* has not said that his *Eclipse* happened at *Full Moon*; but if he has said that it happened in a year in which we most certainly know there was no *Eclipse* of the Sun in the *natural* way, is it not asserting to the question in hand the same thing? Is it not giving us notice of a preternatural *Eclipse* that happened in the reign of *Tiberius*? This surely will be evidence to us, tho' it was none to the ancients : and if upon a fair examination we can with certainty find out that *Phlegon's* *Eclipse*, which we know was in *Tiberius's* reign, did not happen in the first of the 202<sup>d</sup> olympiad, the date of *Kepler's* *Eclipse*, then

we discover with demonstrative evidence that it was preternatural; and that you, Sir, we are in a good measure obliged to for placing this point in so strong a light.

THE debate then in this important question is brought into a very narrow compass. It comes precisely to this, in what year, according to *Phlegon*, this *Eclipse* happened. We have nothing to do for the present with various accounts, and different historians; *Phlegon's* words are what alone we are to enquire after; and indeed if they can with reasonable certainty be discovered, they are a sufficient foundation for our belief as to the point of time, because we very well know that he was an author of learning and credit, and particularly remarkable for that nicety and exactness which a work of this nature required, which was a chronological account of events, disposed according to the olympiads<sup>a</sup>.

*PHLEGON'S* *Olympiads* are lost, but the express words in which he records this Eclipse are extant in several authors,

<sup>a</sup> Phot. Biblioth.



and they are in all uniformly the same, excepting one mistake, which manifestly is such, in this passage, as quoted by *Philoponus*, which will appear when that quotation comes to be considered.

THE words of *Phlegon* are — Τῷ Δ' ἔπει  
τῆς ΣΒ ολυμπιάδος ἐγένετο ἑκλειψις ἡλίου μεγίστη  
τῶν ἐγνωρισμένων πρότερον· καὶ νύξ ἦεν ἡμέρας  
ἐγένετο, ὥστε καὶ ἀστέρας ἐν ἑρανῶ φαινῆναι. σεισμός  
τε μέγας καὶ Βιθυνίαν γυνόμειθα, τὰ πολλὰ  
Νικηίας κατεσφύατο.

*IN the fourth year of the 202<sup>d</sup> olympiad there was an Eclipse of the Sun, the greatest of any known before. It was night at the sixth hour of the Day, so that the stars appeared in heaven: And a great earthquake in Bithynia overturned a great part of the city of Nice.*

THESE are first of all quoted in *Eusebius's Chronicon*, as *Phlegon's* own words, from the 13<sup>th</sup> book of his *Olympiads*, and applied to the time of the Passion of our Saviour, which he reckons to have happened in the 19<sup>th</sup> of *Tiberius*; and there is no dispute

but the 19<sup>th</sup> of *Tiberius* fell in with the fourth of the 202<sup>d</sup> olympiad.

THE next author that mentions them is St. *Jerom*, who translating *Eusebius's Chronicon* into *Latin*, repeats them much to the same sense, expressly making *Phlegon* say that the *Eclipse* happened on the fourth of the 202<sup>d</sup> olympiad. He, indeed, supposes that this year falls in with the 18<sup>th</sup> of *Tiberius*; but in this he does injustice to his author, as well as to truth, and to his own opinion, declared elsewhere, and therefore it ought to pass for one of those numerous mistakes which occur in this translation.

THE third place in which these words are to be met with, is the *Chronicon Alexandrinum*, where they are twice repeated precisely as in *Eusebius*, mentioning in words at length the fourth year of the 202<sup>d</sup> olympiad; and the repetition must be looked upon as a confirmation of the authority, tho' in the same book, because it shews, that in the first text there was no accidental mistake.

THE

THE fourth, or if you please to call it so, the fifth place where *Phlegon's* words are recited, is in *Philoponus*, where they are entirely the same as in the other quotations, with the exception of two words; the one is, that the second year of the 202<sup>d</sup> olympiad is put for the fourth, and the other is, that the adverb (ἐκ) is by a manifest mistake of the transcriber inserted, which makes nonsense of the text; for whereas in all other authors it stands, ἐγένετο ἐκλειψις ἥλιος μέγιστη πρὶ ἐγνωρισμένων πρότερον, it is here ἐκ τῶν ἐγνωρισμένων, &c.

THIS error you, Sir, I think, admit to be such, and will allow that it could not possibly have stood so in *Phlegon*; but you seem disposed to insist on it, that the first disagreement with the other authors is not of that kind, and that it could not have stood the fourth of the 202<sup>d</sup> olympiad in the book from which *Philoponus* copied, but must have been the second, as it appears now in the common editions.

BUT after you have considered how *Philoponus* argues on that subject, when from  
*Phlegon's*



*Phlegon's* account he undertakes to prove that our Saviour's Death and *Phlegon's Eclipse* happened on the 19<sup>th</sup> of *Tiberius*, you cannot possibly persist in that sentiment. His words are,—*For Phlegon says, he began to reign on the second year of the 198<sup>th</sup> olympiad : So that if we compute from the beginning of the reign of Tiberius unto the fourth of the 202<sup>d</sup> olympiad, there are pretty near nineteen years, i. e. three of the 198<sup>th</sup> olympiad, and sixteen of the other four*<sup>b</sup>.

Now, Sir, I must desire you to inform me how could *Philoponus* have read in *Phlegon* the second year in place of the fourth, and then have founded his whole argument on the supposition that it was the fourth and not the second ; could he have quoted *Phlegon's* own words, and absurdly in the same breath, as it were, made use of the authority of this quotation against itself, leaving two various dates so near each other. Indeed, Sir, the nature of the thing will not allow it. No man can seriously doubt that *Philoponus* read the fourth, and not the second of the 202<sup>d</sup> olympiad ; and this,

<sup>b</sup> *Philop. de Creat. l. 2. c. 21.*

therefore, I take to be an unquestionable authority, that *Phlegon* dated his Eclipte in the fourth year of the 202<sup>d</sup> olympiad.

AFTER having brought together these several quotations, agreeing without the least variation, I must observe to you, that there is no other passage now extant of any antient author, so far as I can find, where any one pretends that *Phlegon's* proper words are repeated. Mr. *Wh—n*, indeed, produces a quotation from *Malela*, a fabulous author, who lived, as he says, about the year 600 or 850, but which he cannot positively tell. This *Malela* says, “ concerning which Darknes, that very wise man  
“ *Phlegon the Athenian* wrote in his book  
“ thus, *On the 18<sup>th</sup> year of Tiberius there*  
“ *was the greatest Eclipse of the Sun, &c.*” Now that these are not the words of *Phlegon*, is manifest to any one who reflects that *Phlegon* dates all events from the years of the olympiads, and not from the years of *Tiberius's* reign.

IF this instance then of *Malela* is not an exception, it stands universally true, that no other author extant pretends to give us the  
words

words of *Phlegon* from his own writings : These above recited are all the copies of them that can be produced, and they all agree in the fourth year of the 202<sup>d</sup> olympiad, as well as in every other word and letter.

NEITHER can the consent of all afford any reason to suspect, that they depended so far on the credit of *Eusebius*, as uniformly to copy after him ; for *Phlegon's* book was of reputation, and in the hands of the learned in the times of all those writers, and was, you know, extant in the days of *Photius*.

By this time, Sir, any body who reads this, will be at a loss to guess upon what sort of authority it can be questioned that *Phlegon* placed his Eclipse in the fourth of the 202<sup>d</sup> olympiad, or upon what grounds it can be supposed that he wrote the first and not the fourth of that olympiad ; and truly, if I am not deceived, he will be very much surprized, when he sees the arguments on which you ground your opinion, taken out of the dress they wear in your Dissertation, and its Defence, and shewn in their true and native simplicity.

As



As you cannot produce *Phlegon's* words quoted by any author extant in any other terms than as here stated, you object to *Philoponus*, " That he wrote the second, and " not the fourth year; that he talked inconsistently, and was forcing *Phlegon's* testimony into his service ;" tho' it appears, and with undeniable evidences, as above, that *Philoponus* has fixed it to the fourth, and not the second. To persist thus obstinately in so palpable a mistake, does not seem to be the most proper conduct in him who has undertaken to root out errors of 1500 years standing.

You are pleased likewise to use a very unreasonable piece of freedom with *Eusebius*, that learned and venerable antient: quoting *Phlegon*, he makes him say the *Eclipse* happened in the fourth of the 202<sup>d</sup> olympiad, as all the rest do, and places the passion, as well as that year of the olympiad, under the 19<sup>th</sup> of *Tiberius* : This<sup>d</sup> you, reciting his words say, should be the 18<sup>th</sup>; but for what reason you do not in that place

<sup>c</sup> Def. p. 42.

<sup>d</sup> Diff. p. 42.

mention. Consult *Scaliger* once more, or even the inconsistent *Philoponus*, and both will convince you that the fourth of the 202<sup>d</sup> olympiad fell in with the 19<sup>th</sup> of *Tiberius*, and not under the 18<sup>th</sup>, according to your curious emendation.

THIS piece of criticism leads you to another of the same kind, for which you have some better colour, but no greater foundation in truth. St. *Jerom* translating this passage, agrees with *Eusebius* in every thing, excepting that the 18<sup>th</sup> of *Tiberius* is placed for the 19<sup>th</sup>; but then you produce a sort of argument to prove that St. *Jerom*, consistent with himself, ought so to have placed the Passion of our Saviour.

THIS reasoning of yours admits, that according to St. *Jerom* the fourth of the 202<sup>d</sup> olympiad fell in with the 19<sup>th</sup> of *Tiberius*, and the only argument you offer, why the death of our Saviour should be placed by him in the 18<sup>th</sup>, is, that in the passage in question, he says that the gospel of St. *John* tells us, that our Saviour preached three years after the 15<sup>th</sup> of *Tiberius*, and three being added to 15, making 18, in that year  
you

you conclude, according to St. *Jerom*, *Jesus Christ* must have suffered.

BUT does St. *Jerom*, from St. *John's* gospel, discover that our Saviour preached no more than three years after the 15<sup>th</sup> of *Tiberius*? And do not you yourself confess, (° in the passage cited from you) that St. *Jerom* in another place says that he preached three years and six months? and do not three years and six months, added to the 15<sup>th</sup> of *Tiberius*, bring down our Saviour's Passion to the 19<sup>th</sup> year of that Emperor? With what probability then can it be pretended that it is not a mistake in St. *Jerom's* translation, to change 19, which stood, and ought to have stood in *Eusebins*, to 18? which was neither consistent with *Eusebins*, nor with St. *Jerom*, nor with truth, nor with *Phlegon's Eclipse*, which St. *Jerom's Latin* version puts in the fourth of the 202<sup>d</sup> olympiad, which is the 19<sup>th</sup> of *Tiberius*.

THESE objections, which you are pleased pretty much to insist on, are, if I am not

° Diff. p. 52. Tribus annis & sex mensibus juxta Evangelistam Johannem Evangelium prædicavit. Hieron. Com. in Dan. c. 9.



mistaken, all owing to mere blunders ; and when they come to be examined, are found to turn against that side they were raised to support.

It remains now further to be considered, by what sort of evidence, contrary to all the express testimonies already stated, you would have mankind believe that *Phlegon* placed his *Eclipse* in the first of the 202<sup>d</sup> olympiad, to agree with *Kepler's*, and not in the fourth, to agree with the Darkness of the Passion.

YOUR arguments, that I may not be tedious by repeating your words at length, proceed in this manner: *Africanus*, *Origen*, and almost all the Christian Writers before *Eusebius*, believing that *Jesus Christ* preached but for one year after his baptism, placed his death in the 15<sup>th</sup> of *Tiberius*, or soon after it : Some of these, particularly *Africanus* and *Origen*, refer it to *Phlegon's Eclipse*, as being the same with that Darkness which happened at the *Passion* ; they then must have imagined that *Phlegon's Eclipse* happened in the 15<sup>th</sup> of *Tiberius*, which answers to the first, and not the fourth, of the 202<sup>d</sup> olympiad, and consequently  
they

they have read in *Phlegon* the first, and not the fourth, of the 202<sup>d</sup> olympiad.

THIS argument you yourself allow to be founded on conjecture only, and not on evidence. For Dissertation, p. 41. you say, "Hitherto we may observe that the testimony of *Phlegon* is cited, but his words themselves are never produced, either by *Africanus* or *Origen*:" Indeed when those Fathers are looked into, they pretend to say no more of *Phlegon's* Eclipse, than that it happened in the reign of *Tiberius*; which surely is no contradiction to the date, which by all others is quoted in his very words.

THE whole weight then of this argument, or rather conjecture, rests upon the supposed accuracy of those Fathers; for if we may imagine that in this case they made no nice chronological comparison betwixt the years of the olympiads, and those of *Tiberius's* reign, they might very easily have fallen into the mistake that the Passion happened in the 15<sup>th</sup> of *Tiberius*, tho' *Phlegon* said the Eclipse, which they believed attended the event, fell in the fourth of the 202<sup>d</sup> olympiad. And surely this cannot  
seem

seem strange to you, who are so ready, whenever it serves your turn, to give up the accuracy, as well as honesty, of these pious authors. *Dissert. p. 32.* speaking of *Africanus*, one of the chief of those whose opinion you rely on, “ But so it was in those  
 “ days of primitive zeal, and want of ex-  
 “ actness in critick; there is too much rea-  
 “ son to complain of great carelessness, or  
 “ pious fraud, &c.”

BUT is not the carelessness and want of accuracy in these antient Fathers, who placed the *Passion* in the 15<sup>th</sup> of *Tiberius*, on a supposition that our Saviour preached but one year, still more to be wondered at, when it appears clearly from the *Evangelists*, that our Saviour saw four Passovers at least after his baptism; and will you infer from hence, that the *Gospels* are interpolated or changed? This is a point you do not think proper to insist on: Here you confess the carelessness and inaccuracy of the Fathers: How then can you, from the supposed accuracy of those very authors, raise a conjecture? for it is no more, that the words of *Phlegon* have been changed, contrary to the concurrent testimony of all those more accurate writers  
 who



who quote them verbatim ; More accurate, I say, because their diligence led them to see in the Gospels, those Passovers, which their predecessors did not discover, and induced them to observe and recite the very words of *Phlegon*, of which the others, without consulting, gave their own sense, referring only to the reign of *Tiberius* for the period, and adding from imagination circumstances not to be found in *Phlegon*.

FROM this notable conjecture you make your way to another, which is still more extraordinary ; — “ *Eusebeus*, you say, the  
 “ famous church historian, having reduced  
 “ things to a more methodical chronology,  
 “ has so recited *Phlegon*’s words, and placed  
 “ them in such a manner, as to fix them to  
 “ a certain year, *viz.* the fourth of the 202<sup>d</sup>  
 “ olympiad f.”

BUT pray, Sir, whence is it that you have formed such a notion of *Eusebius*, who has hitherto for his great learning and faithfulness received the highest encomiums from the most judicious writers of all ages?

<sup>f</sup> Diff. p. 41.

Do you conclude, from his suspected orthodoxy in faith, and want of exactness in some points of chronology, that therefore he was a most abandoned and foolish impostor, guilty of a forgery which it was in the power of every man of learning to detect? Have you proved, or made it probable, that *Phlegon's* account placed the *Eclipse* in the first or any other year of the 202<sup>d</sup> olympiad but the fourth? and if that is not allowed, with what pretence can it be suggested, that he forged the date that appears in *Phlegon's* words, when such forgery could serve only to disgrace himself, and the Religion he intended to serve? *Phlegon's* words being then, as he knew, and we all know, in the hands of his adversaries.

BUT if you had recollected how inconsistent this imagination is with another of your own of the same nature, you could not have run into it. For you assert, as I have already observed, that *Eusebius* ought to have placed the Passion in the 18<sup>th</sup> of *Tiberius*. Now by contradicting both your groundless suppositions, and by allowing only that *Eusebius* neither wanted sense nor honesty,

neſty, the whole difficulty you have conjur'd up vaniſhes; it is but ſuppoſing that he quoted *Phlegon* fairly, and then no incongruity at all remains; the fourth of the 202<sup>d</sup> olympiad falls in with the 19<sup>th</sup> of *Tiberius*, the year in which he places our Saviour's Paſſion, conſiſtent with his, and St. *Jerom's* obſervations from the Goſpel Hiſtory: and in this *Eusebius* and the other antients, who repeat preciſely, as he has done, *Phlegon's* words, ſtand uncontradicted by any antient author, or authority whatever, unleſs your inferences from the inaccuracy of ſome of the Fathers are to paſs for evidence.

THE next thing I obſerve is, that you ſtudy to raiſe a ſuſpicion of uncertainty againſt the tenor of *Phlegon's* words, as they are handed down to us by *Africanus* in *Syn-cellus*, by taking notice that *Africanus* does not recite *Phlegon's* words truly, adding circumſtances which we know did not belong to them, ſuch as that the *Eclipse* was at *Full Moon*, and that it laſted to the *ninth Hour*: But, Sir, this does not come up to the point: you know that *Africanus*, even as transmitted to us, does not pretend to give an exact copy of *Phlegon's* words, as the other au-



thors do; he speaks from memory only, with which imagination has mix'd, and even in this place gives no other date to this Eclipse, then that it happened in the reign of *Tiberius*.

BUT to invalidate the testimony of *Phlegon*, you lay greater stress upon *Origen's* silence, than all that your other authors have said for you: & He, it seems, in the *Latin* commentary on *St. Matthew*, does not call in the authority of *Phlegon*, to solve the objection rais'd by infidels against the universality of the Earthquake and Darknes, drawn from their not being recorded by any but Christian writers; but instead of this recurs to a critical exposition of the words of the Gospel, pretending that by the whole earth (*πᾶσαν τὴν γῆν*) was meant only *Jerusalem*, or the land of *Judea*, and that so far from there being any Eclipse of the Sun mentioned on this occasion, that the *Sun* was not so much as named by the *Evangelists*.

Now supposing, for once, this comment to be of equal authority with *Origen's* other

\* *Origen. in Math. Tract. 35.*

works,

works, I cannot see what reason you had to be so fond of it, or of what service it can possibly be of to your cause. It will prove, indeed, that when *Origen* wrote it, he did not think, as he did afterwards, the testimony of *Phlegon* to his purpose; but will it follow from hence that he believed *Phlegon* not to have dated his Eclipse in the fourth year of the 202<sup>d</sup> olympiad? If you have given us a right account of *Origen's* notion of the *Era* of the Passion, sure I am, that no such conclusion can be drawn from any circumstance in this comment, but rather that the contrary may be fairly inferred from it: And you have bestowed 16 pages very ill, if you meant to prove nothing more than that at different times *Origen* was of different opinions.

BUT the defence you have made against Mr. *Wh—n's* exceptions to the genuineness of this passage, fully convinces me, and I believe every impartial enquirer, that there is no occasion to press you further on this head; and therefore I shall only acquaint you, that whereas you are pleased to tell us from



the authority of *Ruffinus*, “ That in matters  
 “ of heresy, or of private opinion, no doubt  
 “ *Origen's* books have been corrupted, and  
 “ made to speak orthodoxly ; and in these  
 “ cases his *Latin* works are not of any great  
 “ authority, nor much to be depended on : ”

I say I shall only acquaint you that next time  
 you have leisure to look into the dissertations  
 of *Ruffinus* and *Huetius* upon this subject,  
 you will find that the *Arians* and other he-  
 reticks, in order to propagate and support  
 their errors, by the authority of so great a  
 name, were the authors of most, if not all  
 these interpolations and corruptions ; and  
 that they took the same liberty with *Origen*  
 that they did with several other of the pri-  
 mitive Fathers, and even with the inspired  
 Writers themselves<sup>k</sup>.

I MUST likewise observe, in respect of  
 those passages, in which *Origen* makes use  
 of *Pblegon's* testimony against *Celsus*, (which  
 sufficiently shew what little regard is to be  
 paid to the authority of the *Latin* com-

<sup>k</sup> Quanta sit hæreticorum temeritas, quam nihil his  
 sancti, nihil pensi, facile intelligi datur ex his quæ fre-  
 quenter ausi sunt, & convicti. Vid. Ruff. Apoll. pro Orig.  
 Ausi sunt idem postmodum Ariani, &c. Origenian. l. 3.  
 c. 1.



ment<sup>m</sup>) that if he does not make so great advantage of this argument as you suppose he would have done, had he laid any stress upon it, it can be assigned to nothing but the uncertainty he was in as to the *Æra* of our Saviour's Passion, and his not being able fully to prove, as you have done, that an *Eclipse* in the fourth year of the 202<sup>d</sup> olympiad was preternatural.

THUS, Sir, you see you are unlucky, as every one must be, who opposes truth and matter of fact with conjectures and suppositions : The very argument you draw from *Origen*, turns against you, and far from proving that *Phlegon's* Eclipse fell in with the 15<sup>th</sup> of *Tiberius*, or the first of the 202<sup>d</sup> olympiad, his not insisting further upon *Phlegon's* testimony infers it bore that date, which in all the authors that recite it, it carries at this day.

<sup>m</sup> Περὶ δὲ τῆς ἐπὶ Τιβερίου Καίσαρος ἐκλείψεως ἢ βασιλευσσομένης τοῦ Ἰησοῦ Ἰωάννη ἐκταυρῶσαι, καὶ περὶ τῶν μεγάλων τότε γινομένων σεισμῶν τῆς γῆς, ἀνέγραψε καὶ Φλέγων ἐν τῷ πνευματικῷ βιβλίῳ τῶν χρονικῶν. Orig. contra Cels. p. 80. "Οἰεται δὲ τερατεῖαν εἶναι καὶ τὸν σεισμόν καὶ τὸ σκότος· περὶ ὧν κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν ἐν τοῖς ἀνατρεφόμενοις ἀπελογοσάμεθα. παραδέμενοι δὲ Φλέγοντα, ἰσορῶσαντα κατὰ τὸν χρόνον τῷ πάθει τῷ σωτηριῷ τοιαῦτα ἀπηντηκάναι. P. 96.

WHEN

WHEN you have candidly considered these things, I am in hopes you will, I am sure you ought to agree, that the time of *Phlegon's Eclipse* is fixed to the fourth year of the 202<sup>d</sup> olympiad, beyond all possibility of contradiction, since every author who recites his words, without any exception, agrees in that year ; since no writer whatever pretends that *Phlegon* mentioned any other year ; since those who were of opinion that the Passion happened three years earlier, and yet were willing, upon the account of other circumstances, to make use of *Phlegon's Eclipse* as an argument, thought proper to omit the particular date, and to speak of it only as happening some time in *Tiberius's* reign ; and since *Origen*, who was a very learned writer, but nearly of the same opinion with his contemporaries as to the date of the Passion, laid but little stress upon this argument ; which it cannot be supposed he would have done, if the time marked by *Phlegon* for his Eclipse, had tallied exactly with what, in his opinion, was the *Aera* of the Passion. In short, the precise year of *Phlegon's Eclipse* is established and confirmed by as full a concurrence of historical testimonies,



monies, as any point in chronology whatsoever; and there is not the least circumstance or matter of fact produced by you, that can impeach the credibility of those testimonies, or any of them, or set up any other year for the date of that event.

BUT before I quit this subject, I must make one more remark upon what you lay down, and I believe very truly, concerning the *Eclipse* which happened in the first of the 202<sup>d</sup> olympiad, and all the other possible Eclipses which could happen in the natural way, for some years before and after our Saviour's Passion.

THE central line of the Eclipse the first of the 202<sup>d</sup> olympiad passed nearly by *Grand Cairo* and *Jerusalem*, there was the middle of the shadow, and the Darkness gradually diminished towards the South and North.

THE words of *Phlegon*, in relating this extraordinary *Eclipse*, and the surprising Earthquake that attended it, have, I think, always been understood to mean, that the Darkness and the Earthquake were observed together, and consequently that it was night

(νύξ)



(vvξ) at the sixth hour, so as the stars were seen where the Earthquake was most remarkable, that is, at *Nice* in *Bithynia*.

AND in this manner you yourself have understood *Phlegon's* words ; for *Dissert.* p. 75. you give us Mr. *Wh—n's* own calculation, as he computed it when desired by you, for the city of *Nice* in *Bithynia*.

Now supposing that in what *Phlegon* calls an *Eclipse*, attended by an Earthquake, the Darkness was such, at *Nice* in *Bithynia*, that the stars could be seen ; I desire to know whether you think that Darkness could proceed from any Eclipse to the Southward, the central line of which passed nearly by *Grand Cairo* and *Jerusalem* ? The common maps will shew you that *Nice* is about ten degrees of latitude from that line, and your learned friends will inform you, that at so great a distance from the center of the shadow, betwixt one and two digits of the Sun's body, must have appeared, which would have prevented the Stars from being seen, or any considerable Darkness ; as you might have been fully convinc'd, by making your observations on the second of *May* last, when ten digits

three

three fourths of the Sun was eclipsed ; and yet I believe it never has, nor ever will be called the greatest Eclipse of any known before.

YOUR Eclipse then in the first of the 202<sup>d</sup> olympiad, was not the cause of that Darkness that was observed at *Nice* in *Bit-hynia* ; and you have proved that no other natural Eclipse happened in the reign of *Ti-berius*, that could possibly occasion this Dark-ness ; what then remains to be concluded, but that this whole story of *Phlegon's* is a falshood ; or that the Darkness mentioned by him was miraculous, tho' he perhaps did not know so much ?

AND this conclusion holds, whether *Phlegon's* Eclipse is said to have been in the first, as you, without any authority, would have it, or in the fourth, of the 202<sup>d</sup> olym-piad, if the Darkness was such as it is de-scribed in *Bit-hynia*, which you seem to allow : And I am confident you will not shift your opinion, since it affords an argu-ment for confirming the history delivered by the Evangelists.



A RELATION of this kind, delivered by a reputable unsuspected historian, must be received differently by different people: with one who denies all miracles, and who is so wise to disbelieve every thing, how well so ever attested, for which he cannot alledge a natural cause, it will gain no credit: but with those who believe that the supreme Governor of the world, for the confirmation of his will to mankind, has controuled, what is called, the course of nature on many occasions, and particularly at the Passion of our Saviour, commanded a preternatural Eclipse and Earthquake, which might prepare the way, (by calling up the attention of mankind to what was then transacted) to that message which was shortly to follow; this relation, which falls in precisely with that period, cannot pass for a fable, but the preserving the memory of it by a pagan historian, for the confirmation of the Christian Faith, must, with humble thankfulness, be regarded as a signal act of Providence.

CREDULITY is, of all things, the most contemptible in a rational creature, except incredulity, the other extream: The golden mean,



mean, a wise good man, free from passion and conceit, and guided by good sense, and reasonable evidence, will pursue : But, Sir, I doubt you have given too much reason to suspect that you require more evidence, on some occasions, than the nature of the thing will admit of : and, not to recur to your conduct in the subject I have just done with, your manner of treating the appeal of *Justin Martyr, Tertullian*, and some other of the primitive Christians, to the acts or reports of *Pilate to Tiberius*, shall be an instance,

THESE acts or reports, whether true or false, could certainly make nothing to your purpose. A miraculous Darkeness they might confirm ; but that you believe, without any evidence from them ; and surely they could not possibly determine any thing concerning *Phlegon's Eclipse* : Yet you are pleased to go out of your way, and employ some pages in opposition to the whole stream of Christian writers, to ridicule the reasonings of those who appealed to them, in answer to the objections of the infidels of antiquity.

THAT neither these acts, nor authentick copies of them, were in the hands of the

antient Christians, may be true ; and that their zeal might have moved them to suppose they contained more than they really did, is very possible ; but still, if we reason truly upon this head, we shall have sufficient cause to conclude, that authentick reports were made by *Pilate* to *Tiberius*, of the proceedings in the trial, and miracles that attended the death of *Jesus* ; and that these acts or reports, as preserved in the archives of the *Roman* emperors, were properly appealed to by the primitive Christians, in answer to the objection, that none but Christians testified to the miracles of *Christ*.

P. 37. of your *Dissert.* you say, " 'Tis  
 " not at all improbable what *Eusebius* has  
 " observed, *Eccl. Hist.* l. 2. c. 2. That 'twas  
 " an antient custom for the governors of pro-  
 " vinces to transmit to their principals what-  
 " ever was new, that they might not be in  
 " the dark as to such matters ; and 'tis possible  
 " that *Pilate* might give an account to *Ti-*  
 " *berius* of the death of *Christ*, but that he  
 " wrote the things which *Tertullian* says he  
 " wrote, has no foundation of probability."

Now, Sir, a very slight acquaintance with the constitution of the *Roman* government  
 under



under the emperors, would inform you, that what you are pleased to look upon from the authority of *Eusebius* as possible, or at best not improbable, was the duty and constant practice of all governors of *Roman* provinces.

Look but over *Pliny's* correspondence with the emperor *Trajan*, and then you will think it more than merely possible that *Pilate* transmitted to his master *Tiberius* some account of the trial and death of Jesus, and of the miraculous events that attended it.

THE crime objected to our Saviour had something in it that seemed to concern the state: He was innocent in the opinion of *Pilate*, tho' in compliance with the instances of the high priest and rulers, and the zeal and fury of the people, he was obliged to deliver him up to be crucified.

A MIRACULOUS Darkness and Earthquake attended his Passion, which *Pilate* knew was at Full Moon; his Resurrection in three days he predicted; and to prevent frauds, a guard of *Pilate's* soldiers was ordered to watch the tomb, from whence the body was, by means unknown, delivered the third day, and  
many



many people avowed they saw him conversing amongst men after his Resurrection.

Now, Sir, can any one who believes all these circumstances to be true, make any question whether *Pilate* could have omitted to give the emperor a full account of them? It is possible *Tertullian* may have been too sanguine in his conjectures, when he suggests that *Pilate* was in his heart a Christian. But it is impossible *Pilate* could have omitted to have made a careful report of these things, without an unpardonable breach of his duty, which on such an occasion is not to be supposed.

AND if it must certainly be admitted that *Pilate* made such a report, what better answer could the primitive Christians make to the objection, that none but Christian writers gave evidence to the miracles that attended the Passion, than by appealing to the pagan archives.

NUMBERS of those who saw and believed, gave testimony to those miracles, at the expence of their blood; but they had made them-

themselves parties, and theirs was not the evidence demanded. And as they were persecuted from place to place, and looked upon as enemies to mankind, they could have no power nor access to enter any facts or transactions into publick archives or records; and therefore cannot be supposed to have appealed to any forgeries of this nature: but then it was incontestable in those days, and he must be but little acquainted with *Roman* usages who doubts of it, that *Pilate* had made an authentick report to his master of the extraordinary circumstances which happened at the death of Jesus. That report they appealed to, that when produced it would prove the Darkeness, the Earthquake, and other particulars which fell within *Pilate's* knowledge; as it certainly must have done, on the supposition, which you must allow, that the facts were true: and I cannot help thinking that their adversaries not producing it, when it was in their power, is a very strong evidence of the facts for which it was appealed to, and you will not deny that the very appeal was a sufficient answer to the objection.

THESE reflexions, I acknowledge, have as little to do with *Phlegon's* Eclipse as your  
 obser-



observations that gave occasion to them ; but I could not help taking notice of your going out of your way, to disparage an argument, which, when not carried too far, is of service to the religion you profess, and which, you say, you have often endeavoured to vindicate. Your manner of doing it of late, as it is entirely new, and apt to be mistaken, is, in regard to yourself, a little unfortunate, but not so, I hope, in other respects. You “ have exposed a weakness, not which the “ learned world have for many centuries “ maintained ;” but which you have but just published to the present age. And if these remarks have in any measure contributed to your general design of “ removing “ prejudices out of weak minds, and shewing “ ing that any man, antient or modern, has “ been mistaken,” it will be a particular satisfaction to him, who is,



*Yours, &c.*